

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: **EXECUTIVE HOST**

DATE: AUGUST 8, 2006

Committee Members Present:

Supervisor Caimano
Supervisor Wm. Thomas
Supervisor Tessier
Supervisor Barody
Mayor Robert Blais, Village of Lake
George
Pamela Morin, Group
Tour/Convention Promoter
Leonard Fosbrook, President, Warren
County Economic Development
Corp.

Others Present:

NYS Association of Fire Chiefs:
Thomas LaBelle, Executive Director
Paul F. Schonewolf, 1st Vice President
Debbie Boniface
Site Solutions Worldwide:
Brigitte Connors
Natalie Whitton
Fort William Henry:
Roberta Daab
Fred Austin
Lake George Forum:
Jason Sherry, General Manager
Joan Parsons, Commissioner of
Administrative & Fiscal Services
Supervisor Kenny
Supervisor Merlino
Supervisor Geraghty
Supervisor Champagne
Paul Dusek, County Attorney
Joan Sady, Clerk of the Board
Kate Johnson, Tourism Coordinator
Janice Fox, Lake George Steamboat
Company
Luisa Craig-Sherman, Lake George
Regional Chamber of Commerce
Bill Dutcher, Americade
Doug Auer, Queensbury
Kathleen Sonnabend, Queensbury
Tony Hall, Lake George Mirror
Debra L. Schreiber, Legislative Office
Specialist

Mr. Caimano called the Executive Host Committee Meeting to order at 1:34 p.m.

Pamela Morin, Warren County Group Tour/Convention Promoter, distributed copies of the Fire 2007 agenda to members of the committee, a copy which is on file with the minutes.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Janice Fox, of the Lake George Steamboat Company, who apprised in conjunction with the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce and Warren County, she was coordinating a series of educational seminars on "How to Create a Convention-Friendly Destination." These seminars would commence in September and be available to members and non-members of the Chamber, she said. Mr. Caimano related it was his hope and desire that the Mayor of the Village of Lake George, the Town Supervisors from Bolton and Lake George, as well as other interested parties would have a round table discussion regarding improvements for Fire 2007. Ms. Fox expounded they had earmarked a few general topics such as rooming blocks, signage, transportation, hospitality seminars, as well as how to work with a meeting planner. Mr. Caimano suggested Ms. Fox offer two possible dates during the week of September 18, 2006 and apprise the Clerk of the Board of the definitive date so all members of the Executive Host Committee could be notified.

As General Manager of the Lake George Forum, Mr. Sherry distributed copies of their proposal utilizing the Forum for the 2007 NYS Fire Chiefs Convention, a copy of which is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Caimano advised the purpose and decision before the committee was the location site for the Fire 2007 convention. He explained a tent would be constructed (essentially the same square footage) on the Lake George Forum property, but the training sessions would continue to be held at the Fort William Henry and the large equipment exposition would stay on the Beach Road. Based upon the proposal submitted by the Lake George Forum, he said he anticipated the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs would receive \$50,000 of Occupancy Tax funds from Warren County and the balance would be paid by sponsorships raised by the fire chiefs.

Mr. LaBelle, Executive Director of the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs, responded that despite the construction of the tent structures outside the Lake George Forum, the fire chiefs were concerned about achieving contiguous space for outside exhibitors. He stated he received numerous compliments from various vendors in attendance at Fire 2006 for the successful layout of the convention. Mr. Caimano stated he understood the square footage would remain the same but the alternative was whether Warren County would spend in excess of \$200,000 for tent structures. In response to Mr. Barody's inquiry relative to the difference between the two proposals, Mr. Caimano replied there were no differences. Mr. LaBelle stated the Association of Fire Chiefs met internally with the staff, volunteers and their Board and they were concerned about their lack of experience of running a convention in two different locations.

While he maintained Warren County would do a credible job offering both locations, Mr. Caimano noted the decision fell within the realm of the Occupancy Tax Committee. Mr. Kenny suggested if the proposal by the Lake George Forum was not acceptable to the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs, perhaps they had an

alternative recommendation on the Fort William Henry property due to the cost prohibition by Warren County. Mayor Robert Blais from the Village of Lake George asked if the fire chiefs would consider contributing a specified amount up-front for the cost of the tents and Mr. LaBelle responded affirmatively. He further expounded the fire chiefs had paid rental fees at other conventions and were willing to continue to negotiate in good faith. However, he remarked, other events such as Americade and the Elvis Festival benefitted from these same tents and the fire chiefs were not able to absorb the cost of the tents for the entire month. Mr. Fosbrook, President of the Warren County Economic Development Corporation, mentioned the tents that were erected for the entire month added value to the other exhibitors and organizations and suggested polling them prior to making a decision. The general consensus of the event coordinators in attendance, representing Americade and the Elvis Festival, was that they were not interested in the tents; therefore, Mr. Kenny recommended the fire chiefs chose either one of the two options as long as the cost to the County was the same.

Fred Austin, representing the Fort William Henry, reminded the committee that Fire 2006 had a positive return on the County's investment, but he said he was concerned about the message being conveyed to other convention organizers. Mr. Barody concurred with Mr. Austin but added if the supervisors did not want to make the investment, that was their decision; however, to ask the fire chiefs to negotiate a specific amount was improper. In an attempt to prove Warren County as a convention location, he said local businesses had become involved and upgrades had been made to the service components. An enormous amount of good will had been achieved at the fire chiefs conference last year, expounded Mr. Barody, and the return on that investment would benefit the taxpayers by holding down property taxes. Mr. Barody stated while he was open to changes down the road, he emphasized changing the location would be a mistake and recommended maintaining the logistics, transportation and vendor location for 2007. Mr. Kenny remarked while this was the first time Warren County had done a convention, if there were things done wrong, such as dependency on sponsorships, now was the time to correct them. Furthermore, he said, he respectfully disagreed with the financial analysis done for Warren County.

As a conference planner, Ms. Connors mentioned conferences of this magnitude do not move easily. When the fire chiefs contemplated moving the convention to Warren County, she said they had discussed a three year plan. She asked the committee to understand the position the County had put the fire chiefs in requesting they change the logistics after one year. Mr. LaBelle explained the move entailed remapping, meeting with every exhibitor concerning lodging, dining, transportation and essentially the County was asking them to start from the beginning. While the fire chiefs anticipated some changes, he said they did not expect substantial changes such as location. Ms. Connors stated the price tag was secondary to bringing the fire chiefs to Warren County and the County had a responsibility of due diligence prior to any contracts being executed. While the fire chiefs understood the position of the County, she said, they could not expect a

successful second year by moving the conference from one location to another. Mr. Caimano remarked Warren County agreed to various modifications in exchange for sponsorships to support the cost of the tents. If it was not the appetite of Warren County to host conventions, Mr. Barody suggested the County not enter into any future contracts and forget about moving forward.

Mr. Geraghty recommended the fire chiefs remunerate Warren County a fee similar to what they paid for the NYS fairgrounds, as well as obtain a cost analysis for the tent structures based on one week versus a three week duration. In addition, he said, this would allow the fire chiefs an ample opportunity to obtain sponsorships.

As stated previously, Mr. Kenny said the County would pay \$50,000 per event and it would become the decision of the fire chiefs whether they chose to support the difference. On the other hand, if the fire chiefs decided not to make up the difference, the supervisors must decide whether they wished to hold the convention in 2008, he added.

Mr. Champagne remarked the fire chiefs were invited to Warren County under the pretense that the County would do what needed to get done, which they did. He said he believed the fire chiefs deserved the right, privilege and honor of bringing them back for future years.

Chairman Thomas expounded with a year of experience, the County should be able to derive a better cost estimate. He said he agreed with Mr. Kenny that definitive prices needed to be established and secured this year.

Mr. Stec remarked the solution did not lie in significant changes to the venue but rather in redefining the financial relationship.

Mayor Blais commented he concurred with Mr. Geraghty and Mr. Stec. He noted that Mr. LaBelle offered the fee paid in Syracuse and recommended obtaining quotes from other tent companies so the committee could make a fair decision.

As many members have suggested, Mr. Caimano explained, this matter would be referred to the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee for their decision. If the cost estimates were obtained, the Occupancy Tax Committee should be able to vote on the best option to proceed with, he noted.

Mr. Caimano commented no one was attempting to change the venue but they were attempting to resolve a gliche. While they learned their lesson, he said, Warren County had an obligation to mitigate it as much as possible. Chairman Thomas expounded the County told Mr. LaBelle last week a decision would be made in a week and now they were asking him to wait an additional two weeks. Mr. Dusek replied the Occupancy Tax Committee could not entertain any action or discussions during this meeting, but he noted, there was a board meeting scheduled for August 18, 2006. Mr. Caimano stated he could not vote today because he needed to see the estimates, as well as obtain a written commitment from the fire chiefs

suggesting they would pay \$76,000 and Warren County would pay \$50,000, thereby arriving at some common ground.

Pursuant to the Occupancy Tax rules, Mr. Kenny reminded everyone Warren County would not expend in excess of \$50,000 on any one event and should they exceed that amount, there was the potential for other coordinators asking for the same special privileges.

Chairman Thomas queried Mr. LaBelle's time line and whether he would commit to a specific location and Mr. LaBelle responded if the fire chiefs offered a certain amount of money, they would expect these facilities at the Fire 2007 convention.

Mr. Caimano recommended forwarding copies of the Executive Host Committee minutes to the Occupancy Tax members and to schedule an Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee meeting between now and August 18, 2006 in an effort to obtain a consensus of the recommendation to the full Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Tessier questioned if they were being asked to consider all expenses or just the cost of the tent structures and whether there would be a fee for the use of the Fort William Henry property. Mr. Caimano said he did not expect the figures to change dramatically, with some expenses increasing or decreasing depending on which facility was chosen. After discussions with Steve Billings from Regal Tents as well as Mr. LaBelle, Mr. Austin apprised that with a few minor modifications, the Fort William Henry would not be closed entirely and their normal property fee was \$15,000.

Mr. Austin remarked there were discussions with other potential convention groups that expressed a desire to host events in Warren County based on the Fire 2006 Convention.

Mr. Kenny articulated that Warren County should insist any lodging rental during the fire chiefs convention be done so within the County. He reported there were 140 rooms that were offered and rented in Saratoga County when Warren County funded the event. Mr. Tessier commented there were two fire conventions simultaneously and many motels were reserved from Hudson Valley long before the Warren County convention so he did not expect that to be an issue another year.

Chairman Thomas stated he would like to recap the meeting and offered a proposed agenda that Mr. LaBelle would need to report to the members of the Occupancy Tax Coordination committee as well as what Warren County would offer the fire chiefs. Mr. Caimano said that as he understood it, there were two options:

- 1) Make no changes to Fire 2006, construct the 3 tents on the Fort William Property and pay the \$15,000 property fee; or
- 2) Move the exhibitors to the Lake George Forum so the County would be within the guidelines of expending \$50,000 with the balance being paid by the fire chiefs.

Chairman Thomas queried whether the committee wanted to leave both options open or should a decision be made relative to which facility would be utilized for 2007. Mr. Barody responded that the Occupancy Tax Coordination committee was, so-to-speak, the finance committee and that committee did not make determinations where to hold functions. In summation, Chairman Thomas stated the fire chiefs desired to hold the event in 2007 like 2006 and therefore, the fire chiefs would go to the Occupancy Tax Committee requesting funds to finance the convention in 2007.

Mr. Dusek explained the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee was the only committee to recommend funding to the Board of Supervisors. He said no final determination could be made until the County decided upon their contribution. Ms. Morin, Group Tour/Convention Promoter, queried who was responsible for coordinating the information for the Occupancy Tax Committee. In addition, she requested letters of acceptance from the Fort William Henry to the fire chiefs addressing the dates and property fee rental, as well as the fire chiefs welcoming an invitation and specified dates. Mr. Fosbrook stated he would contact Steve Billings relative to a written quote for the tent structures.

Mr. LaBelle stated he would convey the information to his board and within a week they would have a proposal or proposals for the desired facility and a fee for the facility.

There being no further business to come before the committee, on motion by Mr. Barody and seconded by Mr. Stec, Mr. Caimano adjourned the meeting at 2:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra L. Schreiber, Legislative Office

Specialist